

Farm Security Administration
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

October 17, 1938

Mr. Sheldon Dick
237 East 48th Street
New York, New York

Dear Shelly:

I enjoyed lunch with you very much. It was a quiet and pleasant break in an otherwise hectic day. I fear I did not express my thanks for the lunch when I left you, so here they are now.

You will probably be on your way, shortly, for Shenandoah. My suggestions follow: First, the general approach to your problem. Before you touch your camera look the town over carefully. Walk or drive around and around. Look at the people, at the stores, stop at the street corners, and listen in at the filling station and the saloon. Then go back to your hotel and try to write an answer to this question, "Why does this town exist?" Only after you have done this will you be able to make up a detailed shooting script. It is terribly important that before you start taking pictures you have in the back of your head a pretty definite feeling as to what makes up the town--is it different from any other town? If so, how and why? As you walk around the town and look at it try to get some feeling of the "personality" of the place. As you make up your shooting script remember that it is an American town and has many things in common with others. I suggest you refer to the general shooting script on American towns before you meet anyone. Try to look at the "skeletons in the closets". Use your view camera for an over-all picture of the place. In doing this you will better prepare yourself to photograph people and how they live.

The specific things I noted when I was there were that the town dropped down into a Pennsylvania mountain valley. Everywhere you look is man-made desolation, waste piles, bare hills, dirty streets. It is terribly important that you in some way try to show the town against this background of waste piles and coal tipplers. In other words, it is a coal town and your pictures must tell it. It is a church dominated place. Only an airview taken just right could adequately show the number of churches in the town. The place is not prosperous. People are loafing in saloons and around the streets. You must get this feeling of unemployment. There are many unpaved streets, and there are streets that open out on waste piles. The houses are old and run-down. The place is devoid of paint. I am sure lots of cheap liquor is consumed for no other reason than an attempt to blot out the drabness of the place. When you are ready to shoot people try to pick up something

of the feeling on the side of youth. Try to portray the hopelessness of their position....youth's confusion--liquor, swing, sex, and more liquor. The actual details will have to be worked out by yourself. It is an excellent opportunity to turn out a swell set of pictures but will require a hell of a lot of thought. Forget DeKruif and medical pictures for the present, and put your full attention on this other set and see what happens.

I hope you have a copy of Leighton's article with you. Read it again after you have looked the town over.

Drop me a note after your first few days up there and report on progress.

Sincerely yours,

Roy E. Stryker
3000 -39th St. NW

P.S. Shelly, it is absolutely necessary that you get in your travel report at monthly periods, that is the end of each month. Money for travel is encumbered for each month the first of that month, and any old balance is liquidated, so you can see if you don't get in your bid for that money, it might be liquidated and there is a chance you won't get it at all.